Corporations take the heat for bleeding Earth

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The title, it turns out, may be overly optimistic. In this alarming documentary, dozens of unimpeachable scientists warn that our gluttonous species is on the verge of extinction. So if all of human history were compressed into a single day, the two-minute warning has already been sounded.

Initially, that urgent tone makes "The 11th Hour" more challenging than the film to which it inevitably will be compared, the Oscar-winning "An Inconvenient Truth."

Whereas Al Gore presented a methodical slideshow about climate change, Leonardo DiCaprio, who produced and narrates this film with a sincere intelligence, starts with visceral images of interrelated catastrophes, from melting glaciers to Chinese pollution to America's latest war for natural resources.

The true weapon of mass destruction, several of the on-screen analysts contend, is the unchecked power of multinational corporations.

Reprising his testimony from the superb documentary "The Corporation," Ray Anderson, the chastened CEO of an industrial carpet company, says that American businesses have asserted the same rights as individuals yet have none of the moral principles.

Thus, even though there is sufficient public will and technical wherewithal to promote renewable energy sources, the oil companies and their shills in government and the media won't stop sucking the Earth dry until their shareholders are satiated. And by then it will be too late for our fragile ecosystem.

Yet unlike "An Inconvenient Truth," this film manages to end on a hopeful note. The hope for the planet is that it will surely outlast the silly humans who think it belongs to them. And the hope for the silly humans is that they will grow up and start making the fundamental changes that are necessary to coexist with nature.

Some of the voices in the final discussion, about sustainable development and environmentally friendly design, may be too multicultural and New Age-y to sway Americans who feel entitled to unlimited consumption.

But it's hard to ascribe a liberal agenda to someone such as Steven Hawking, and the most hopeful quote in the movie comes from Winston Churchill, by way of former CIA director James Woolsey.

Americans, Churchill said, almost always end up doing the right thing - but only after they've exhausted all other possibilities.

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'The 11th Hour'

B+ PG; 1:35 Contains some disturbing images Bottom line: A hard-hitting yet hopeful documentary about the global meltdown.

Notes

REVIEW - MOVIE

Graphic

PHOTO

PHOTO - Producer Leonardo DiCaprio narrates 'The 11th Hour.'

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